

7 Religious unionism and separatism

In his article entitled “Did They Define the Outcome? Churches and the Independence Referendum in Scotland”, Sergei A. Mudrov studied the importance of religion for Scotland’s political autonomy. According to the study, religious officials (clergy) refrained from taking a stand in the referendum and left it up to the faithful themselves to decide whether to vote in favour of or against Scotland’s secession from the United Kingdom (Mudrov 2018: 39).

The following Chapter analyses this neutrality among different religions in Scotland. It further suggests that the neutrality of the clergy highlights the importance of religion in the UK and Scotland. Religion is still a crucial factor in the Scottish nation in the 21st century. It has been one of the most critical factors in explaining the likelihood of Scotland’s political autonomy, either within the British state as a region or through secession from the UK. Religion in Scotland is of particular importance because it is a regional particularity in the system of the world society. By the laws of the United Kingdom, the Scottish community was guaranteed Presbyterian church government in 1707. However, church splits (e.g. disruption) and unions, church resignations, emigration from the then-majority Protestant population and the influx of believers of different religions have significantly changed the religious composition of the Scottish population over the last century (Brown 1997; Muirhead 2015).

Against this backdrop, the various SNP governments have repeatedly called for religious tolerance, fearing ethnic strife otherwise. Furthermore, Roman Catholicism, becoming increasingly influential in Scotland (Bonney 2013), is a resource of national solidarity.

Thus, the neutrality of the clergy is to be understood based on the potential for ethnic conflict in the Scottish community. The conflict potential concerning Scotland’s political autonomy is between the political collective of inclusion, which is open to all religions, on the one hand, and the feeling of national solidarity characterised by the Presbyterian religion, on the other. Scottish cohesion based on a shared national religion polarises Scotland’s movement for or against political autonomy. The sense of national belonging may relate to the United Kingdom’s Protestantism or Scottish Presbyterianism, both making Scotland’s secession from the British state improbable. Alternatively, an attempt can be made to base reli-

gious affiliation on the Roman Catholicism of the Scottish Stewart dynasty or on multiculturalism, which facilitates the attempt for Scotland's statehood.

7.1 Clergy – “present the arguments”

How did the religious communities deal with the upcoming referendum on national independence against the background of this potential for ethnic conflict? What did the clergy advise the faithful to do about the referendum?

7.1.1 Neutral churches

Peter Brierley's last census counted 83 active religious communities in Scotland, mostly churches and 3,689 congregations (Brierley 2017: 95). At the beginning of the campaign phase 2012, most of the 83 denominations opted for neutrality on the referendum, leaving the decisions to the faithful.

Scotland's most significant number of believers currently identify with the Presbyterian church, the Church of Scotland (Kirk). In the last census, 51 % of all believers in Scotland and 32 % of the population stated they belonged to this church (National Records of Scotland 2011). The Kirk emerged from the Reformation in the mid-sixteenth century. Scotland's reformers, such as John Knox, spoke vehemently against “popery”, against bishops and any form of hierarchy. They wanted to realise the ‘principle of parity’ as far as possible (Wormald 1991: 123). As explained in the discussion section below, Presbyterianism in Scotland was secured by the Acts and the Treaty of Union 1707. Subsequent Acts, notably the Church of Scotland Act 1921, further consolidated the Presbyterian church government in Scotland by declaring in Article III that: “Church is in historical continuity with the Church of Scotland which was reformed in 1560, whose liberties were ratified in 1592, and for whose security provision was made in the Treaty of Union of 1707.” (Brown/Green/Mair 2016: 32)

However, this Presbyterian church arrangement starkly contrasted with the hierarchical episcopacy supported by another major church in Scotland, the Scottish Episcopal Church. Many Episcopalians refused to take the oath of allegiance to William and Mary and their successors in 1689 because such an oath would contradict their complete submission to royal authority and the Scottish Stewart monarchy. These non-jurors and the few Roman Catholic Scots supported the Stewart cause in the following decades (Brown/Green/Mair 2016: 12; Devine 2012: 34). These Jacobite rebellions were attempts to replace the Presbyterian church order of 1690 (and 1707) with the Episcopal hierarchy. However, in the last census in Scotland (2011), only 21 thousand people described themselves as Episcopalians.

Alongside the Presbyterian Kirk and the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Roman Catholic Church plays an increasingly important role in Scotland. “[N]early oblit-

erated in Scotland at the Reformation”, it now has the second largest number of believers in Scotland: 25 per cent of all believers and 16 per cent of the population (Brown/Green/Mair 2016: 31). While in 1755, they made up only one per cent of the population (16,490 people), it was mainly Irish immigrants in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who contributed to the growth of this church in Scotland. In recent years, immigrants from the eastward expansion of the European Union in 2004 have also contributed to this growth. This denomination is followed by approximately 76 thousand Muslims, 67 thousand Church of England believers (who are not members of the Scottish Episcopal Church) and 26 thousand Baptists.

Due to the significant number of small and geographically concentrated denominations, in the following analysis, I focus on the most significant and most widespread denominations in Scotland and ask how these denominations voted on the Scottish independence referendum.

Most of the 83 denominations in Scotland voted in favour of neutrality at the very beginning of the official campaign period in May 2012. All nine churches members of the ecumenical movement Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS), founded in 1990, voted in favour of neutrality. The following table lists these churches and the number and proportion of their faithful.

Table 8: Professing believers in Scotland according to the census (2011)

Action of Churches Together in Scotland	Believers	Share of all believers	
Church of Scotland	1.717.871	51,2 %	
Roman Catholic Church	841.053	25,1 %	
Scottish Episcopal Church	29.337	0,9 %	
Methodist Church in Scotland	10.979	0,3 %	
Salvation Army	4.100	0,1 %	
Congregational Federation	2.078	0,1 %	
United Reformed Church	2.021	0,1 %	
United Free Church of Scotland	1.514	0,0 %	
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)	1.339	0,0 %	
Sum (based on Census 2011)	2.610.292	77,8 %	
Professing believers in Scotland (only religion)			3.354.287
Total Population			5.295.403

ACTS members include the largest churches in Scotland, such as the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church. ACTS comprises 78 per cent of all professing religious believers in Scotland.

What was the reason for the neutrality of these churches? They justified their neutrality as an alternative to conflict. Neutrality was necessary because the democratic debate was already polarised, so one could either be for or against Scotland's secession from the United Kingdom. The churches opted for neutrality to allow believers and voters to develop and discuss arguments for and against secession. An example is the Church of Scotland's (Kirk) published rationale for neutrality. The highest decision-making level, the Annual General Assembly meeting, decided in May 2012 that the Kirk would remain neutral in the referendum. The Kirk called on the campaigners to present their arguments:

"We do not expect or wish that the Church of Scotland should take a position on the question itself, though we do hope that the Church can, at the local and national level, engage with the issues, encourage informed and respectful debate, and contribute our own vision for Scotland's future so that, whatever the decision of the people, Scotland might be a healthier, happier and more peaceful place in the years to come. The Council would urge those campaigning for or against independence to consider that they present the arguments in terms of what is their vision for the future of Scotland and then how does their preferred option help in making this vision a reality." (Scottish Affairs Committee 2012: 138f.)

The Kirk wanted to remain an active and vital player in this debate through neutrality. Churches should be places where the future of Scotland is discussed and acted upon. Campaigns should meet in church to explain their reasons on neutral ground (on the hope of inner-worldly mastering typical of Calvinism, see Parsons 1967: 65). In its decision, the Kirk identified itself quite naturally with Scotland. A reference to its self-image as Scotland's national church.

The second largest church in Scotland, the Roman Catholic Church, also decided in favour of neutrality at the clergy level. Father Thomas Boyle, parish priest in Bishopton and then Deputy Secretary General of the Scottish Bishops' Conference, explained in an interview:

"The Catholic bishops looked at the question: Would the church its freedom be impaired remaining in the United Kingdom or being in an independent Scotland? And the answer was there was no difference. So this is a purely political question. And so it is for Catholics to look at the issues and to decide. There was no moral content. [...] This is not a moral issue, this is a political issue. And when we look at what the bishops, and the pope rather, had taught in recent years, Johann Paul II has said: We make no comment on constitutional matters. You know, the only thing that we offer to society is a vision of who the human person is. [...] It was on

the basis of that sentence from one of his Encyclicals that the bishops were quite confident in saying: This is a purely political question in which we are not going to offer any view [...]. So this is not a question for us." (Boyle 2015)

The bishops assessed the situation in Scotland and referred to Pope John Paul II's encyclicals, concluding that the referendum issue was a 'purely political question' that should be decided by the voters themselves. Boyle goes on to say that this distinction between political and religious issues is a relatively recent development in Scotland:

"The leader in the 1970s, when I was at school, a man called William Wolfe was an absolute bigot. He hated Catholics. And there was no way on God's earth that my parents or grandparents would ever vote nationalist. Now the big change is that today that fear of nationalism as being an expression of Scottish Presbyterianism and anti-Catholicism that's gone. That's been the achievement of the Scottish National Party. That in 10 or 15 years they have managed to assure a great number of Catholics in the Catholic community, who have chosen to vote SNP or to vote for independence in the referendum, that they have no fear that they would lose their schools or that there would be discrimination against Catholics if there was an independent Scotland. [...] [T]hey have done it very well by you know saying Scotland is a country of many cultures. You know because there is the Pakistani culture, there is a Sikh culture, there is a Muslim culture [...]. And then there is this whole Irish background that many of us have which is not something to be ashamed of." (Boyle 2015)

One prerequisite for neutrality is the multiculturalism on which the political inclusion collective is based. The SNP, which has been part of the Scottish Executive since 2007, was particularly important here. Various studies have shown that the nationalism advocated by the SNP is primarily "civic", as it eschews ethnic concepts of national affiliation (van der Zwet 2015; Leith 2018; Hepburn 2015). Therefore, this quest for autonomy of the political inclusion collective has implications for the national-cultural collective of the Scottish nation. Democratic nationalism combines national self-determination with the notion that people living in Scotland should also have a say in shaping the national community. With a particular focus on immigrants from Ireland, Devine and Rosie describe this recent and multiple institutionalisation of multiculturalism in Scotland:

"As late as the 1960s, however, the 'Scoto-Irish' remained disadvantaged in terms of occupation, income, health and education. [...] Within a few decades, however, the Catholic position in Scottish society was transformed. The key drivers of this social revolution included the decline of some of the old heavy industries where sectarian employment practices had been endemic, the impact of secularisation on rigid religious boundaries, as the Christian churches came together in an ecu-

menical spirit against the common enemy of secularism, and a huge expansion in educational opportunities for Catholics.” (Devine/Rosie 2020: 278)

Studies on career choice, health and education, as well as marriage and friendship, “hardly confirm the popular image of a Catholic-Protestant divide in [contemporary] Scotland” (Devine/Rosie 2020: 281). Since the early 1990s, a party-political distancing regarding Catholicism has been observed in Scotland. This has particularly affected the Labour Party, which benefits from the Catholic population in Scotland (Walker 2020: 323–330). Comparably, Mudrov quotes a Catholic priest who explains:

“After the 2007 elections, when the SNP took power, Scottish education civil servants, who had always kept the Church out (‘no, no, we administer all things, you don’t’), were sent out to ask us what our concerns were and what we were interested in, and what they could do for us. This had never happened in 100 years and this means openness to religion.” (Mudrov 2018: 29)

Many causes are responsible for the multiculturalism we see in contemporary Scotland. One of these aspects is the successive Scottish governments, particularly the SNP-led governments, which have observed and politicised “anti-Catholicism; anti-Protestantism; anti-Irish racism; and anti-British racism” (Scottish Government 2018: 27).

Two weeks before the referendum, a bishop of the Scottish Episcopal Church, which has 30 thousand members, shared a similar assessment. In the Dundee Courier newspaper, he called on the faithful of this church to take an active part in the referendum. Everyone should deal openly with the issue of the referendum and ask themselves what they think about Scotland’s political independence:

“[P]articipation in the referendum is crucial and a high turnout is desirable. [...] I don’t believe in compulsory voting but not considering the issues or bothering to vote gives a poor example to the 16–18-year-olds newly given the vote and to our grandchildren. [...] ‘Should Scotland be an independent country?’ is the referendum question which begs our sense of personal and political belonging. Like many households who will be voting in the forthcoming referendum my own situation is a complex emotional geography of birthplace, family membership, occupation and residence, of cross-border Scottish-ness and British-ness. True independence is to vote honestly and we should keep faith in the referendum.” (Peyton 2014)

The faithful were urged to take part in the referendum. Again, the clergy only called for participation but did not specify which option the faithful should choose (see also Primus Chillingworth 2014). What did the Baptist Church in Scotland advise its believers to do? The Baptist Church also opted for neutrality and left it to the faithful to decide on national sovereignty in the referendum. Only an open discussion, ex-

plained Rev Dr Reverend Stuart Blythe, will enable the faithful to make an authentic decision on this issue:

“referring to the more primal stage of Baptists intentionally discussing the issue with one another in the light of Scripture and in the presence of the Spirit. Such is meant to be central to the Baptist way of being the church. [...] A congregational discussion may well decide, or even be predicated by conviction, but is an area where we act as the church scattered, each exercising our own ‘vote’ according to conscience. Yet the conversation remains critical. For it ensures that we will exercise our own conscience, informed by the Scriptures and the hopes and fears of those people among whom we now confess through faith and baptism that we find our primary identity.” (Blythe 2013)

The referendum discussion also offers the opportunity to find new believers.

With around 13,000 believers, the Evangelicals are another crucial religious community in Scotland. Like the Baptists, the Evangelicals are not members of ACTS. However, the Evangelical Alliance in Scotland has also decided to remain neutral on the referendum: “[T]he Alliance takes no side but strongly believes that the role of the Church is to provide spiritual leadership. God’s guidance is required for the proper functioning of society, in fact, for 300 years the Church has given spiritual guidance without taking sides.” (Evangelical Alliance Scotland 2014a)

In order to improve society through ‘God’s guidance’, the Evangelical Alliance explains, the church must adopt a neutral position.

Many churches that have decided to favour neutrality locate themselves as contributors to the issue of national self-government. They have organised discussions and published reports in which hopes and fears concerning Scotland’s future should be articulated. The churches were supposed to create open spaces for discussion. But two exceptions characterise Scotland as a religious nation.

7.1.2 Fundamentalist churches

Two denominations took a clear position on the upcoming referendum and spoke out against secession. These were the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), which also opposed secession. Both interpreted the referendum as a primarily religious question and “religion and nationalism as analogous phenomena”, as Brubaker (2012: 3) calls this “research perspective”. There could only be one answer: No to secession because political independence would jeopardise Scotland, united by its national religion.

The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland has 1,197 members and has rejected secession (as of the 2011 census). In its synod in 2013, it decided to campaign vehe-

mently against Scottish secession. This decision was based on the fear of increasing secularisation and the growing political influence of the Roman Catholic Church:

“we fear that a move away from a specifically-Christian acknowledgement in the foundation of our national life will only strengthen the powers of the kingdom of darkness in their opposition to Christ. Under a secular constitution it will be even more difficult than it is at present to introduce legislation founded on biblical principles. [...] However imperfectly the United Kingdom has implemented Christian principles over the years, the fact remains that Britain is still officially committed to protecting the Protestant faith. Breaking the Union will abolish that protection. Indeed, there can be no doubt that the Roman Catholic Church will have far greater political influence in an independent Scotland than it presently does under the Union, since the proportion of Romanists is much higher in Scotland than in Britain as a whole.” (Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland 2014a, 2014b)

The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) split from the Free Church of Scotland on 20 January 2000 and was even more resolute in its opposition to secession. This church has just under 1,000 members. In the report of its Public Questions, Religion & Morals Committee, the rejection of secession is explained as follows:

“We believe that independence as proposed will diminish the place of Christianity in our country; [...] presents a grave threat to our Protestant throne and Presbyterian establishment; [...] endangers our religious and civil liberties; [...] [and] cannot be morally justified.” (Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) 2014: 8)

Not only had God deliberately brought Scotland and England together, i.e. “the Lord was at work to bring the nations of Scotland and England together for the strengthening of His cause”. but in the event of secession, the Church would be threatened with “disestablishment” (Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) 2014: 6, 4). It was foreseeable that the SNP government would attempt to undermine the religiously legitimised sovereignty of the people through secession:

“our country’s present Christian constitution being replaced by a largely secular one. [...] In the White Paper “the sovereignty of the people” seems to mean that the people can choose whether they wish to be governed by the law of God or some other code. Such thinking lies behind the moral and social changes of recent decades. To the Scottish reformers, popular sovereignty meant that kings are put into office by their subjects and are under human as well as divine law, such that the people may call wicked rulers to account. The people authorise the government, so that while the parliament is legally sovereign the electorate are politically sovereign. Yet both parliament and people are under God’s sovereignty and accountable to Him.” (Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) 2014: 7)

This church understood the hopes of Scottish nationalism as a reversal of what it saw as the correct religious and social order guaranteed in the United Kingdom. In the event of secession, society would no longer be determined by God and Scotland would no longer be a religious nation, but the Scottish nation would be governed by the political inclusion collective of those who live in Scotland (multiple inclusion and thus 'person' would replace 'God' as a generic term see Stichweh 2005: 62; multiple inclusion of the 'person' as a characteristic of modernity is demonstrated by Bohn 2006; Bohn 2008; Fuchs 1995, 2003; Lehmann 2006; Luhmann 1993: with various arguments).

Specifically, the report of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) states that secession would mean that the people and the legislature would no longer have to answer to God but to the "civic society", in which the church is "just another element" according to the ideas of the secession campaign, decides and writes into the constitution.¹

From a historical perspective, this concern is understandable, as reformers such as John Knox saw Scotland as a role model for the entire world.² However, this view can only be found in traces in tiny religious communities in modern world society. It is also interesting to note that these faith communities have an extremely high level of integration. For example, around 830 of the 1,200 members of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) attend church services every Sunday. In contrast, the "Sunday Church Attendance" rate for the other churches in Scotland is 7.2 % of the faithful (and in England 5.3 % see Brierley 2017: 14-15). The extreme discrepancy shows that the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), which openly opposes the guiding principles of functional differentiation, is a fundamentalist counter-structure of world

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- 1 "Scotland's Future views the church as just another element of civic society. The approving reference to the role of various groups in "shifting attitudes to matters such as same sex marriage" is disturbing. In a future independent Scotland will churches which do not support homosexual unions continue to enjoy the freedom to oppose them, believing them to be wrong and sinful according to the Bible? [...] When it is said that 'private institutions' will be expected to 'improve the diversity and gender balance of their governance' is there an implicit threat here to churches and other Christian organisations which follow the Bible's teaching on male headship and exclude women from office?" (Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) 2014: 7)
 - 2 John Knox interpreted "the Scottish Kirk to be the 'most perfectly Reformed church' in existence. Furthermore, he sought to have *these Reformation principles applied not only in the specifically ecclesiastical sphere, but also in the life and action of the whole nation*. In this he believed that Scotland was showing the way to others – even to Geneva!" (Reid 1973: 27 Herv. P.R.; Dawson 2014) Emphasising the globalisation of this secular social order, the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643 states that "we shall [...] endeavour in our several places and callings, the preservation of the reformed religion in the Church of Scotland". The "reformation of religion" is to be carried out worldwide using the "example of the best reformed churches", because God is "the Searcher of all hearts" (General Assembly/House of Commons 1643: §1, §VI; on the consequences see McCallum 2014).

society, the reasons for which are probably to be found in historical and local peculiarities (especially in the Reformation and insularity).

Overall, however, it should be noted that most churches have interpreted the decision on national independence as a personal decision that every one of them should discuss, weigh up and make for themselves.

7.1.3 Preventing ethnic conflict

The churches' neutrality about the independence referendum expresses their commitment to the Scottish community.

A good example is the "What Kind of Nation? Manifesto for a Future Scotland" report by the Evangelical Alliance Scotland. In it, the future of the Scottish nation is linked to questions of shared beliefs: "What fundamental values do we wish to live by? What kind of society do we want to live in? What kind of Scotland do we aspire to be?" (Evangelical Alliance Scotland 2014b: 6)

The manifesto calls for discussion of the "four well-known Christian values that are inscribed at the heart of Holyrood: wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity" (Evangelical Alliance Scotland 2014b: 6). The debate already taking place is "a bland economic debate focused solely on the technical aspects of independence, involving only the political classes". Instead of discussing technical details, people were asked to discuss their hopes in the context of their fears. One of the recurring themes of the manifesto is the "damage by the rampant individualism that has no regard for wider society" (Evangelical Alliance Scotland 2014b: 17).

The manifesto addresses the future of Scotland in terms of fears and problems. However, while the Evangelical Alliance itself does not take sides, it is easy to see that its manifesto, published six months before the referendum in September 2014, echoes the concerns of those who campaigned against Scotland's secession. As Jackie Baillie, Labour Party executive member of the Better Together campaign, said in an interview, the main arguments against secession were material fears, "how individuals feel they would be better or worse off financially" (Baillie 2015; see also Mackinnon 2014).

With its manifesto, the Evangelical Alliance of Scotland has added to these primarily economic anxieties, such as currency, jobs and tax policy, concerns about family and community, both of which stem from "rampant individualism" as the report makes clear.

In discussing the forthcoming independence referendum, Scotland's largest denomination, the Church of Scotland (Kirk), has taken a similar approach. It, too, has interpreted the debate primarily as a search for shared values. The Church of Scotland organised 32 events across Scotland under the heading *Imagining Scotland's Future*. These events were intended to create an "interesting picture of Scotland at the grassroots" (Church and Society Council 2014: 5). The church engaged with its

communities and youth organisations to develop such a picture. Around 900 people from all over Scotland took part in these events. After a short introduction by the organiser, participants were asked the following questions: “1. What values are most important to you for the future of Scotland? 2. how can we make Scotland a better place to be? 3. how do we put our aspirations into action?” (Church and Society Council 2014: 2)

The participants then discussed their answers in order to arrive at a common list of priorities. A total of 3,741 ideas were written down and statistically analysed for the report *Our Vision: Imagining Scotland's Future*. The ten priorities were: “1. equality, 2. fairness, 3. justice, 4. education, 5. respect, 6. honesty, 7. community, 8. opportunity, 9. compassion, 10. tolerance”. (Church and Society Council 2014: 8)

The church searched for shared values and found that egalitarianism is the most essential national value of all. In the report's theological reflection, equality is explicitly linked to the nation: “[n]ations are to be judged by their care for the most vulnerable, in whom we encounter Christ the scapegoat” (Church and Society Council 2014: 41). Martin Johnstone said in the interview that his personal impression is that the church needs to work harder for equality. The Kirk “needs to work harder at demonstrating that it's about a fairer, more equal world, a just world, and a fairer, more equal, and more just Scotland.” (Johnstone 2015)

This search for shared values was a strategy to avoid ethnic conflict. The report notes that the “adversarial frames that dominate political and media discourse were largely absent” (Church and Society Council 2014: 1). The actual polarisation between, for example, British Protestantism and Jacobite Catholic separatism was obscured: “A number of ideas were directly related to the Referendum on Scottish Independence and advocated independence or remaining in the Union. These have not been expanded on here, as we sought to look beyond the polarising question of yes or no during our events.” (Church and Society Council 2014: 32)

As these sentences show, the Church of Scotland sought to shift attention from the question of Scotland's constitutional future to the question of shared national values. Looking back, Johnstone said of the *Imagining Scotland's Future* series of events:

“I think for a period of time the Church of Scotland was left denuded of what its role might be. [...] I think that's partly to do with increasing [...] levels of secularism but also increasing levels of multiculturalism. [...] I think that contribution [i.e. *Imagining Scotland's Future*] was probably a part of the shift [...] from the debate being about whether or not Scotland should be independent into what sort of Scotland we wanted regardless of whether that was remaining within the Union or as an independent country.” (Johnstone 2015)

From their perspective, the churches interpreted the forthcoming referendum as an opportunity to emphasise why religion remains important to the future of the Scottish community. In addition, the churches provided impulses such as values for the nationalist discourse, for example, in discussions about equality. Yet, how did the faithful decide in the referendum?

7.2 Believers of unionism and separatism

If we look at the post-election surveys on the referendum concerning religion, an ethnic polarisation linking the question of Scottish statehood with religion becomes apparent. The referendum shows a tendency towards polarisation between Protestantism and Catholicism. With 45 % in favour and 55 % against secession, the faithful voted similarly to the Scottish population as a whole in the referendum (Henderson/Jeffery/Liñeira 2015: 5; Lord Ashcroft 2014: 49). However, there is a clear distribution between the religious communities, as the following table shows.

Table 9: Voting result of believers based on post-election surveys on the referendum of 18 September 2014 (religious affiliation according to 2011 census)

	Population in k	For secession		Against secession	
		in %	in Tsd.	in %	in Tsd.
Final result of the referendum	5.295,4	45 %	2.367,0	55 %	2.928,4
Protestant	1.942,6	34 %	653,3	66 %	1.289,3
No religion	1.941,1	60 %	1.169,2	40 %	771,9
Roman catholic	841,0	61 %	517,0	39 %	324,0
Not stated	368,0	63 %	231,0	37 %	137,0
Other religion	136,0	68 %	92,2	32 %	43,8
Church of England	66,7	18 %	12,0	82 %	54,7

Protestants and Church of England believers, in particular, voted against secession with an above-average majority. Half of the 2.9 million people who voted against secession in the referendum belong to these two religious' communities.

Conversely, the result is just as dramatic. People who do not profess or conceal a religion, as well as members of Scotland's second largest church (Roman Catholicism) and small non-Christian faith communities (especially Buddhism), voted more than 60 % in favour of Scotland's independence. This non-religious population, as well as Catholics and religious minorities, accounted for almost 85 % of all votes in favour of secession in the referendum.

The result of the referendum shows a polarisation between the believers of Protestantism on the one hand and the believers of Roman Catholicism and the non-religious population on the other. Religion was important for the outcome of the referendum for both sides. Protestant support for Scotland remaining in the United Kingdom was above average. Roman Catholics, many of whom had only recently or a few generations ago settled in the country, clearly favoured Scottish independence as did those, who do not have a religion. Thus the Scottish independence movement was not only a 'social justice movement', it can also claim to be a multiculturalist movement. It was overwhelmingly supported by Roman Catholics as well as non-religious people, albeit for different reasons.

The importance of religion in Scotland's quest for statehood can hardly be overestimated. In contrast to the neutral stance of the clergy, Protestant unionism and Catholic separatism are still real and relevant in the national community of Scotland in the 21st century. Multiculturalism and religion were key factors in deciding the outcome of the referendum.

7.3 Discussion

The study raises the question of religion as an explanatory factor for the Scottish quest for political independence. In this context, three important conclusions are discussed below.

7.3.1 The clergy's neutrality as responsiveness

Mudrov interprets the position of active neutrality as a practical consideration on the part of the religious actors: "official anti-independence statements from Churches (had they come) would have looked as a sign of disrespect to the government, which was willing to show a high degree of support to religious organisations." (Mudrov 2018: 40)

Based on the "holy trinity" of Scotland's Kirk, law and educational tradition" that was crucial in the Protestant Unionism of the first half of the twentieth century (Tor-

rance 2020b: 47), religious division between Protestantism and separatism was to be expected even today. In his interpretation, Mudrov underestimates the tense situation regarding Scotland's regional autonomy, which since 1707 has been primarily a religious autonomy. The fact that this religious social structure of Scotland was endangered by the referendum on political independence was seen not only by the supporters of the two fundamentalist churches, as the exit poll shows. Therefore, the reluctance of the clergy and church organisations to preside over the referendum must be interpreted in the light of the referendum result.

Neutrality was a strategy to avoid conflict, as otherwise, ethnic clashes between Protestant unionism and Catholic as well as non-religious separatism could have been expected. By remaining neutral, the clergy had, for the time being, defused the potential for religious and political conflict expressed in the Scottish anthem and the symbol of the thistle. Furthermore, the clergy were probably also aware of how the faithful would decide.

Through the clergy, religion became responsive to the Scottish quest for autonomy. Responsive means an action that is based on the anticipation of future states (conceptually Stichweh 1993: 202f.; programmatically Stichweh 2004; cf. Krichewsky in Ahlers et al. 2020). Responsive communication extends observation from the internal environment of the function system—in this case, religion—to the social environment, such as the socio-cultural unit of the nation. It is also characterised as responsive by drawing conclusions from this observation of the social environment, which translates into offers for interests that still need to be articulated.

First and foremost, the church sought to create a place where hopes and concerns about Scotland could be openly discussed. According to church representatives, this discussion would otherwise have had no place. By actively adopting a neutral position, the independence referendum gave the churches “an opportunity [...] to ensure that the debate is about what sort of Scotland we want rather than the fiscal vehicle for delivering that”, as Martin Johnstone of the Church of Scotland said (Johnstone 2015).

The clergy's neutrality was also responsive because it anticipated ethnic conflict with the question of Scottish independence. It sought to prevent ethnic conflict through neutrality. There were no escapades of conflict between unionist Protestantism and Catholic-Jacobite separatism.

Typical of responsiveness was that the decision to remain neutral was forward-looking. Most churches in Scotland committed themselves to this neutrality concerning the Scottish independence referendum at the start of the two-year referendum campaign, even though only a third of the Scottish population favoured secession at that time.

7.3.2 Explaining protestant unionism

What is the basis of British unionism that was decisive for the referendum? It can be seen in the religious determination of the Scottish nation. Much like the two fundamentalist churches expressed above, this interpretation of the Scottish nation emphasises the history of Scotland as a primarily religious community that is given its autonomy through the United Kingdom.

Thus, many Protestants promoted the 1707 Union of Scotland with England as a defence against the papacy. In the words of the then parliamentarian William Seton, the Union was “the Bulwark of the Protestant Religion and Interest” (Seton 1706). This fear of the influence of Roman Catholicism and the religious decline of the Scottish community, as the two explicitly anti-establishment denominations put it, is part of the explanation. It allows us to understand why so many Protestants voted against secession and why, conversely, many Catholics and believers in Scotland’s religious minorities interpreted statehood as an opportunity. In this context, Norman Bonney speaks of competition for believers:

“measure[s] promoted by the [Roman Catholic] Church to indicate an affinity with the cause of independence for Scotland, which would further erode the UK state in which the Church has no statutorily recognised standing and in which it is specifically excluded from key institutions of state, in favour of an independent Scotland where it would inherit certain constitutional advantages and might be able further to advance its social, religious and political influence.” (Bonney 2013: 482; Steven 2008: 194)

However, this fear of the papacy is not only cultivated in the small circles of fundamentalist churches. This narrative is also important in the Orange Order, which has around 50,000 members in Scotland and still commemorates the victory of William III of Orange against the Catholic Stewart King James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. In the words of Joseph Webster, who undertook ethnographic fieldwork on this order in Scotland from 2012 to 2016, it was about protecting British Protestantism: “according to many of my Orange informants, the real choice was not between independence or unionism, but a hidden choice between bondage to despotic ultramontane Catholicism or freedom within the divine monarchical mandate of British Protestantism.” (Webster 2022: 28)

Roman Catholicism will not and cannot change and therefore the ‘price of freedom [...] is eternal vigilance’, Webster reads in a book entitled *This is Rome*, which he finds while working in the Grand Lodge archives (Webster 2022: 22). Fear of the Vatican, Webster reports, sometimes even led Orangemen to vote with Irish Catholics for the Labour Party in order to weaken the SNP’s independence aspirations. During the referendum campaign, the Orange Order registered on the side of the Better To-

gether campaign, which was campaigning against Scottish statehood. However, due to concerns expressed by both sides (The Guardian 2014) that the Orangemen's beliefs would jeopardise the success of the union campaign, they rebranded as British-Together:

“By relinquishing access to the political mainstream, the Orange Institution chose to sacrifice any status gains they had hoped to make by partnering with ‘Better Together’ in order to avoid the risk of handing the SNP the damaging opportunity to label all unionism as sectarian-by-association. The Order’s alternative campaign – pointedly called ‘British Together’ – made a fraction of the impact it could otherwise have achieved by focusing all its efforts on getting the vote out in loyalist communities.” (Webster 2022: 26)

Apart from the regular commemorative marches on 12 July, this conflict is kept alive in Scotland primarily through football: “Scottish Orangeism’s membership persistence may owe something to the way Rangers-Celtic matches ‘translated’ sectarianism into the postmodern age. Thus even as religion declined, the ubiquity of Premiership football may have endowed Orangeism with relevance for many young Protestant Scots.” (Kaufmann 2009: 15)

In his study of the global spread and influence of the Orange Order, Eric P. Kaufmann concludes that the Order had little political influence in Scotland in the second half of the twentieth century. With an increase in membership of the Order to up to 2 % of the population, Scotland showed a surprising trend worldwide in the post-war period. However, since the Pope visited Scotland in 1987, membership there has also fallen to less than one per cent of the total population. Nevertheless, the ethnic-religious conflict over the common state sometimes comes to a head in football. This was the case, for example, at the spontaneous championship celebration of the fans of Glasgow Rangers, who won the Scottish football championship after a long time. With numerous British flags, the Rangers fans marched to George Square in Glasgow after the last game of the season on 15 May 2021 to celebrate the championship. This was in breach of the Scottish Government’s COVID-19 restrictions, which had just been renewed for Glasgow. From the perspective of the protagonists of the Scottish autonomy movement, there was, as the then First Minister Sturgeon put it in a tweet, “vile anti-Catholic prejudice” (quoted in The Guardian 2021).

7.3.3 Religious and political autonomy: Ecumenism

As an alternative to the Protestant-ethnic or Catholic-Jacobite interpretations of the Scottish nation, there is the tolerance of religious diversity expressed in multiculturalism. This multiculturalism promotes the Scottish quest for political autonomy based primarily on the political inclusion collective. Yet, how can this happen in a

small community like Scotland, with only about 5 million inhabitants but 83 different denominations? The answer lies in this religious diversity in such a small space.

In line with research on religion in contemporary Scotland, we find the prevalence of ecumenism at the level of religious performance roles and their church organisations. However, it was only in the second half of the twentieth century that ecumenism took hold in Scotland. The protracted struggle, for example, between Presbyterians and Episcopalians or between moderate and evangelical Presbyterians, according to Robert Louis Stevenson, is a struggle between “people who think almost exactly the same thoughts about religion” (Stevenson 1878: 17; Devine 2012: 374), for a state-sanctioned religious hierarchy was defused by ecumenism. Three hundred years ago, this ecumenism was highly unlikely in Scotland. At that time, questions of church government were closely linked to the debate about the parliamentary union of Scotland and England. W.S. Reid summarises:

“although the covenants were not reaffirmed in the Revolutionary Settlement of 1692, yet one of the central requirements for the acceptance of William and Mary as monarchs was the guarantee of the position of the Scottish church, for while the Scottish parliament amounted to little or nothing, the church was the heart of the Scottish national identity, a position reconfirmed in the Union of 1707.” (Reid 1973: 29; Mullan 1995)

Therefore, Karin Bowie concludes that the Union of Parliaments of 1707 was primarily about competing ideas about the nature of church government:

“Yet though ordinary Presbyterians and Jacobites could join in patriotic attacks on the treaty, their unity was compromised by their loyalties to divergent forms of church government and the monarchies that supported these churches. These differences contributed to the making of the Union by preventing the opposition from cooperating to the degree necessary to stop it in 1706–7.” (Bowie 2007: 71)

The protection of the Presbyterian Church government of Scotland from Episcopacy was of paramount importance in the laws and treaty of union between Scotland and England in 1707. This was achieved by ratifying the “Act for the Security of the Protestant Religion and Government of the Church” in 1707 (Jackson, A. 2020: 49).

The Act was incorporated into the Treaty of Union (Article XXV). It stated that the Presbyterian government was to be the sole government of the Church in the Kingdom of Scotland. A few years later, this provision was challenged by the Patronage Act (1711): “An Act to restore the Patrons to their ancient Rights of presenting Ministers to the Churches vacant”. However, the early union between Scotland and England depended on securing the Presbyterian church government in Scotland.

For ecclesiastical affairs in Scotland, the policy of the United Kingdom became even more important in the early decades of the twentieth century. After several conflicts over Presbyterian self-government and mandates, there were the disruption, repeated church splits and reunions (Brown 1991; Muirhead 2015). At the beginning of the 20th century, several churches joined together to form the United Free Church and in 1909 entered into negotiations with the Kirk in order to “achieve the primacy of spiritual independence, [...] leading eventually to the ‘Glorious Union’ of 1929, which brought most of the congregations of the former secessionist churches back within the fold of a greatly strengthened and enlarged Church of Scotland.” (Bradley 2014: 165)

Crucially, this 1921 Act “with its privileging of rules made by the Church of Scotland over statutes made by Parliament”, as Iain McLean emphasises, granted religious autonomy within the polity of the United Kingdom (McLean 2020: 125). Similarly, James Weatherhead contrasts the religious autonomy granted by the Church of Scotland Act 1921 with earlier provisions:

“While, in terms of its own constitution, the Church of Scotland was recognised as the national Church in Scotland, it was no longer properly described as ‘by law established’, because the law had now explicitly recognised that the church was established by the Lord Jesus Christ. This means that, while the 1707 act may still be regarded as law protecting the Church from State interference, and is in this sense reinforced by the 1921 Act, it cannot be construed as preventing the Church from modifying its own constitution without reference to the State.” (quoted in Bradley 2014: 167)

The Church of Scotland Act secures the government of the Presbyterian Church in Scotland not only by a privilege of the state, but also by Parliament granting religious autonomy even in opposition to legislation, as Weatherhead and McLean emphasise. Therefore, it was not only Scotland’s political autonomy that was at stake in the 2014 independence referendum but, above all, the religious autonomy of the Scottish nation. “[T]he doctrine [...] that Church and state are both institutions of God”, writes Free Church Moderator John S. Ross, are at stake in the referendum because

“what happened in 1707 was nothing less than the re-establishment of both the Church of England and the Church of Scotland through the Union. [...] Abandon the Union and you cut the nation adrift from the establishment principle’s legal basis in the UK’s Act of Accession and Coronation Oath.” (Ross 2011)

Ross criticises that in the 650 pages of Scotland’s Future White Paper, there is only the following sentence on the relationship between church and state in an independent Scotland: “We propose no change to the legal status of any religion or of Scot-

land's churches." (Scottish Government 2013: 564) By remaining neutral on the outcome of the independence referendum, the Church of Scotland and other churches risked the national status of Scotland's Presbyterian church government.

The neutrality of religious performance roles is consistent with what Callum C. Brown describes as "a gradual and inexorable shift to a 'voluntaryist' position – or belief in separation of church and state" about the Scottish community that began from the end of the eighteenth century (Brown 1997: 17). As a latent component of Scottish national identity, the covenantal myth of election, which was central to Calvinist Scots in the sixteenth century, as Anthony D. Smith notes, is still important today, albeit in the form of ecumenism (Smith 2008: 42).

Moreover, unlike the Anglican Church of England, there was not just one national church in Scotland (Bradley 2014: 160). Historically, both the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church of Scotland (Kirk) have some reason to claim the status of a national church of Scotland. As far as the Church of Scotland is concerned, Brown, Green and Mair point to numerous aspects by which this church has lost influence in recent decades, i.e. in a sense a "soft disestablishment". Apart from direct legal recognition in Scotland's advisory education committees, the Church of Scotland has today lost all privileges (Brown/Green/Mair 2016: 94).

In other words, the Church of Scotland could not have risked its status as a national church privileged by the state, as there is no such constitutional status in Scotland today. The Kirk, writes Donald Smith, has lost its national significance. It is "no longer a lead or leading national body". Referring to the Pentecostal story, Smith explains: "Christianity affirms and brings together the diversity of humanity. It does not aim to impose uniformity" (Smith 2013: 41, 114). The Kirk competes with the other churches for importance to the Scottish nation. With neutrality, it had the opportunity to win believers on both sides irrespective of the outcome of the referendum.

Another important reason for religious tolerance is the primacy of the political inclusion collective in Scottish politics and independence movement. This imperative of inclusion leads to a fear of ethnic conflict. All members of the Scottish Parliament interviewed by Nasar Meer were "positive (often very positive) about the fact of religion pluralism in Scotland" (Meer 2015: 1490). Similarly, Mudrov quotes clergy who justify their neutrality by saying they fear sectarianism (Mudrov 2018: 37). At the level of religious performance roles, the Scottish nation is pluralised. Religious pluralism is recognised and, with it, a mutual responsibility of national and religious autonomy. The "Scottish form of establishment", writes Duncan B. Forrester, is based on national identity and voluntarism and not on "statecraft" and legislation (Forrester 1999: 88).

This religious pluralism in Scotland is an indicator of functional differentiation, as Rudolf Stichweh states: "The world religious space, unlike the space of other function systems, is permanently pluralistic and in this plural inclusion in 'religion', which relies on mutual acceptance, there is a decisive contribution of religion to

modernity.” (Stichweh 2020a: 186 translated by the author; in contrast, see the formation process of religion due to strife in Pollack 2020)³

The denominations compete with each other and recognise other religions – apart from the two fundamentalist denominations – as being of equal value. They accept the renunciation of the privileges guaranteed by the Act of Union (1707) and the Church of Scotland Act 1921. Religion is a precursor to valuing equality in social relations, as was also evident from discussions with the faithful of various Protestant denominations:

One example is the focus groups on the referendum conducted by Eric Stoddarts with believers of different denominations: “By far the most common theme across all the groups was the question of social justice and, linked to the issue of a perceived democratic deficit, whether independence would enable and result in Scotland becoming a more just society. [...] We can say that ‘Kindheart’ is as much a myth as is ‘Braveheart’.” (Stoddart 2014: 339f.)

This egalitarianism was underpinned by the few clerics who openly spoke out favouring Scottish political independence, such as the cross-party group Christians For Independence, founded in 2009. Three weeks before the referendum in 2014, 33 ordained clergy from the Church of Scotland joined this group, calling for a “more socially just Scotland” and the abolition of nuclear weapons of mass destruction in Scotland (BBC 2014a). Rev Dr Doug Gay presented the group’s Scotland the Nation pamphlet. In it, he promotes the vision of “participating in a free and democratic society alongside our neighbours of all faiths and none” (Gay 2020). The Christians For Independence brochure concludes with a commitment to the “spirit of co-operation and ecumenicalism” (Christian For Independence 2020: 9).

This appreciation of ecumenism aligns with the findings of Zafirovsky (Zafirovski 2014). According to him, religious pluralism is necessary to catalyse the democratic impact of Calvinism. Future research should, therefore, consider the religious autonomy expressed in ecumenism in explaining the conditions for (Scottish) democracy and nationalism (Brown 2016).

3 “Der weltreligiöse Raum ist, anders als der Raum anderer Funktionssysteme, dauerhaft pluralistisch und in dieser pluralen, auf wechselseitige Akzeptanz setzenden Inklusion in ‘Religion’, besteht ein entscheidender Beitrag der Religion zur Moderne.”